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PRESS RELEASE:

Dan Colen solo exhibition 'Sweet Liberty' opens at Newport Street Gallery

Newport Street Gallery is pleased to present an exhibition of work by Dan Colen (b.1979, New Jersey), opening on 4th October 2017 and running until 21st January 2018. 'Sweet Liberty', Colen's first major solo show in London, surveys the entirety of the artist's career to date and also features new paintings and large-scale installations.

Colen came to prominence in New York in the early 2000s alongside a group of young artists that was informally labelled the 'Bowery School'. The group included Hannah Liden, Nate Lowman, Ryan McGinley, Agathe Snow and Dash Snow among others.

Playful and nihilistic, Colen's work examines notions of identity and individuality, set against a portrait of contemporary America. 'Sweet Liberty' spans a period of seismic change in US history: the earliest painting in the show, *Me, Jesus and the Children* (2001–2003), was begun days after the 9/11 attacks, whilst the newest exhibited pieces were made in the wake of the 2016 presidential election.

Colen's influences range from early modern religious painting to Arte Povera, Abstract Expressionism and Pop. These appear alongside the use of the ready-made, photorealism, trompe l'oeil, graffiti and traditional crafts. Continually playing with the relationship between object, viewer and environment, Colen invites fundamental questions concerning the role of the artist, such as: "*Where does art happen? Where in the process does something transform or pick up new energies or new possibilities?*" (Source: Interview with Ali Subotnick, *Sweet Liberty*, exh. cat., Newport Street Gallery, London 2017.)

Colen is well-known for using so-called waste materials as paint. Examples of his long-running series of Gum paintings feature in the show, made from countless individual pieces of chewed gum [*Pop My Cherry!* (2010)], or vast, sculptural smears of brightly coloured stuff, in the more recent *Marbles in My Mouth* and *All Mops and Brooms* (both 2015). The Trash works, meanwhile [*Oh Madonna!* and *Mama Mia!* (both 2016)], mix discarded ephemera – gathered by the artist from the streets of New York – with paint. The trash objects are used as unwieldy brushes to form shapes based on the compositions of Raphael's exalted *Madonna and Child* paintings.

Much of Colen's work can be read as self-portraiture, or explorations of what the self means, particularly within the context of American masculinity. On entering the exhibition, the viewer is immediately confronted with *The Big Kahuna* (2010–2017), a giant American flag, with

twisted flagpole and a 20-tonne concrete base, presented as if uprooted from the landscape. Barely contained by the gallery space, the flag was conceived as a self-portrait in 2010, after a challenging period in the artist's life. Today, however, the political statement feels unavoidable; the flag's bloated, patriotic machismo failed and laid to waste.

A significant collection of the artist's Board works, in which slogans and phrases are seemingly spontaneously spray-painted, as well as paintings from Colen's newest series, *Viscera*, also feature in 'Sweet Liberty'. Conceived as details of rainbows, *Viscera* (2016) and *Viscera* (2016–2017) bear countless layers of unadulterated pigment in fractionally different shades, which combine to create dense hues.

Colen's multi-layered Scooby Doo sculpture, *Haiku* (2015–2017), bears testimony to his interest in the development of image-making, whereby digital technologies attempt to invite the immortal characters of a fantasy, cartoon realm into the 'real' world.

The presence of Colen's extraordinary 2012–2013 installation, *Livin and Dyin*, is felt throughout the exhibition, in negative spaces punched aggressively through the gallery walls that expose the underlying brickwork. When *Livin and Dyin* finally reaches its denouement, it does so in the collapsed shapes of the cartoon figures of Wile E. Coyote, Kool-Aid Man and Roger Rabbit, as well as a life-size sculpture of the naked artist himself. Colen considers the all-American, male characters to be self-portraits of sorts. He has explained that he imagines *Livin and Dyin* "as an orgy where you don't know if it's after or before climax, it's about that edge – where does it begin, where does it end?" He continues: "This show is about those dichotomies – form and content, material and narrative – opposing or not necessarily related things that are both pivotal parts of one's experience."

The exhibition is accompanied by a fully illustrated catalogue, with texts by Hugh Allan, Francesco Bonami, Blair Hansen and an interview between the artist and Ali Subotnick. In conjunction with the exhibition, Colen will present a live performance of *Livin and Dyin* during Frieze week.

Notes to editors

About Dan Colen

Dan Colen was born in 1979 in Leonia, New Jersey. He received his B.F.A. in 2001 from the Rhode Island School of Design, Providence. His work is held in various public collections including the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York; the Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Washington, DC; the Albright-Knox Art Gallery, Buffalo; the Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles; Moderna Museet, Stockholm; and the de la Cruz Collection Contemporary Art Space, Miami. Recent solo exhibitions include 'Help!' at the Brant Foundation Art Study Center, Connecticut (2014); 'The L...o...n...g Count' at the Walter De Maria Building, New York (2014); 'Psychic Slayer' at the Herning Museum of Contemporary Art, Denmark (2015); 'Shake the Elbow' at the Albright-Knox Art Gallery, Buffalo (2015); and 'Oil Painting' at the Dallas Contemporary (2016).

Colen currently lives and works in New York.

About Newport Street Gallery

Newport Street Gallery opened in Vauxhall, south London, in October 2015. Spanning five buildings, the gallery presents solo or group exhibitions of work drawn from Damien Hirst's extensive art collection, which he has been building since the late 1980s. Hirst's interest in curating dates back to the beginning of his artistic career and his organisation of the groundbreaking 'Freeze' exhibition in south London in 1988.

The gallery is the realisation of Hirst's long-term ambition to share his extensive collection of art – which includes over 3,000 works – with the public. In October 2016, the gallery was awarded the respected RIBA Stirling Prize for the UK's best new building of the year.

Entry to all exhibitions is free.

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Newport Street Gallery

Newport Street, London, SE11 6AJ

www.newportstreetgallery.com

Opening times

Tuesday – Sunday 10am – 6pm

Closed Mondays

Please see website for details of bank holiday opening times.

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